RAJYA SABHA

Wednesday, the 8th August, 1990/ the 17th Sravana, 1912 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock,

MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

OBITUARY REFERENCE

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Members, before we take up today's agenda, I refer with profound sorrow to the passing away of Dr Gopal Singh in Delhi this morning.

Dr. Gopal Singh was born at village seria Niamat Khan (North West Frontier Province) in November 1917 and was educated at the Khalsa College, Amritsar and Lincoln's Inn, London. He was Chairman of the All India Punjabi Conference and Inter-religious organisation. He was a life member of Indian Council for Africa and Indian Council of world Affairs and Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee, Nanded. He was nominated to the Rajya Sabha in 1962 and remained its member up to 1968. He was also Governor of Goa and Nagaland and Chairman of the Minorities Commission. He was a prolific writer and had over one hundred publications to his credit including the first ever English translation in free verse of Guru Granth Saheb in four volumes.

In his passing away, we have lost a noble friend, guide and a literary figure.

We deeply mourn passing away of Dr. Gopal Singh.

I request Members to rise in their places and observe silence as a mark of respect to the memory of the departed.

(Hon. Members then stood in silence for one minute.)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Secretary-General will convey to the members of the bereaved family our sense of profound sorrow and deep sympathy.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Marine pollution due to mineral oil spill at Cochin port

*21. SHRI JOHN F. FERNANDES: Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have ordered any enquiry into the recent mineral oil spill at Cochin port;

(b) if so, what is the finding in this regard and the extent of marine pollution caused by this accident; and

(c) whether Government have any oil spill recovery Vessel with them; if not, whether Government propose to make arrangements with some foreign companies to seek their help in such accidents?

THE MINISTER OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI K. P. UNNIKRISHNAN): (a) Yes, Sir. A fact finding team was sent to Cochin Port to enquire into the matter.

(b) The main findings of the team are as follows:

(i) The source of fire is naptha which got discharged to port waters from a ship.

(ii) Fire fighting and pollution monitoring and control arrangements are not adequate and need to be improved.

(iii) Systematic and rigorous training is required to be given to fire fighting personnel.

(iv) Before deballasting, segregated ballast tank should be checked for any contamination.

The entire spillage of naptha was burnt out and no oil residue was seen on water after the fire accident.

(c) Visakhapatnam Port has an oil skimmer of capacity 20 cu.m. and Madras Port has a multi-purpose vessel which can be used for skimming oil spillage. Mormugao Port has a portable oil skimmer. Besides this, the Coast Guards

have a nucluer of pollution control equipment at Bombay and Madras. At present there is no proposal to have any arrangement with any foreign company for help on such occasions.

SHRI JOHN F. FERNANDES: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Minister has admitted that the explosion was brought under control. But it has not been mentioned whether it was done by the Port authorities. After this incident, I happened to visit Cochin. My information is that we were fortunate that due to the presence of the Western Naval Command, it was brought under control. It is these people who brought this major tragedy under control. The Minister has also mentioned that they have facilities for oil skimmer only at three major ports. We have 11 major ports in the country. May I know from the hon. Minister whether adequate arrangements will be made to provide these vessels and to keep these vessels in working condition?

SHRI K. P. UNNIKRISHNAN: Sir, while we are grateful for any assistance rendered by the Navy or the State Government, the Port authorities themselves did take the initiative and brought it under control with their own fire-fighting arrangements. I entirely agree, as I myself stated in part (3) of my answer, that the fire-fighting arrangements are inadequate in many other major ports, including Cochin. And this is a matter of concern. As a matter of fact, in the Seventh Plan itself our Ministry had represented to the Planning Commission and the Government the need for adequate fire-fighting and pollution control arrangements, and in the Eighth Plan which is being finalised we hope to have better arrangements in all the ports. And in relation to Cochin in particular, the proposal is pending before the Planning Commission.

SHRI JOHN F. FERNANDES: Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether they have any national crisis team in coordination with different Ministries such as Environment and Petroleum and if not, whether they would propose to have such a team?

SHRI K. P. UNNIKRISHNAN: Sir, we have frequent consultations with other Ministries. There is no standing arrangement as such. And as I said, we have our own arrangements in different ports, and we have also close liaison with the Coast Guard and other fire-fighting agencies. And we also take the help of the State Government. But primarily the ports themselves should be self-sufficient in relation to these matters. And apart from that, we have taken many other steps in recent years to see whether the marine pollution is brought under control and contingencies like this are prevented wherever possible and attended to immediately.

SHRI N. E. BALARAM: Sir, most of the newspapers have written that the Port authorities were not cooperative or rather were unwilling to have rescue operations. Some four or five people died due to this accident and they could find the bodies only after a week. They were not given any compensation. Is it a fact? I want to know from the hon. Minister.

SHRI K. P. UNNIKRISHNAN: I am afraid, it is not true, Sir. The Port authorities, as I said earlier, they themselves took the initiative. But the bodies could be recoved only later. And we have also ordered compensation. The compensation of Rs. 5,000 which is normally paid, I personally think, is inadequate. And I have requested the Port Trust to increase this to Rs. 25,000 for each bereaved family. And they did co-operate. Many others like the Coast Guard did cooperate in finding out and recovering the bodies, as I mentioned earlier. But it is not true to say that the Port Trust did not take sympathetic attitude or did not take the initiative.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI: Sir, it might be true that at this port, perhaps, naphtha or whatever it was might have been controlled. But my basic point is such occasions arise many times. Particularly in Bombay it was not naphtha but it was a collision between two foreign ships, and the oil was spilled on the coast of Bombay and Western Maharashtra. At that time, it was a very dangerous situation. It

was a poison to the marine life and particularly to the people across the sea coast, right from Ratnagiri to Bombay. And there was no other facility. If I am right—you may correct me if I am wrong—foreign technology and foreign experts were called in at that time. There is a vital necessity for adequate arrangements. When India is going in for new technologies in regard to such matters, this sort of enventuality has to be taken into consideration. It was a total havoc in Bombay. That is why I would like to know whether it is possible?

SHRI K. P. UNNIKRISHNAN: I share the concern of the hon. Member on this. I entirely agree with him.

As far as the question of technology is concerned, we have adequate resources ourselves. In certain special conditions like, probably, the one he was referring to which happened in 1984, we do take the help of certain foreign agencies. But it is not always required.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI: This happened two years ago.

SHRI K. P. UNNIKRISHNAN: In 1984.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI: No. In 1987.

SHRI K. P. UNNIKRISHNAN: We have adequate resources. What we need is proper equipment. I hope, the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance would agree to our proposals to strengthen our own arrangements in terms of personnel, training as well as equipment. Then, we will be able to deal with this effectively.

DR. YELAMANCHILI SIVAJI: Sir, a Bill was passed by this House last year, in accordance with the Geneva Convention, to protect marine waters. I would like to know from the hon. Minister what steps have been taken by the Government to implement the provisions of this Bill so that marine waters are protected. Part (b) of my question is: There are a number of minor ports. Though, technically, they may be minor ports, for all practical purposes, they are major ports like Kakinada, for example. What steps have been taken by the Government to protect the marine water at Kakinada?

MR. CHAIRMAN: This supplementary does not arise from the main question. Of course, it is important, but the supplementary does not arise from this question. Question No. 22.

Rehabilitation of Sri Lankan refugees

*22. SHRI S. MADHAVAN: Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what steps have been taken by Government to rehabilitate the refugees from Sri Lanka; and

(b) what are the details of the Rs. 10 crores relief plan for Sri Lankan Tamil refugees submitted by the Tamil Nadu Government and what action has been taken on this plan?

गृह मंत्रालय में राज्य मंत्री (श्री सुबोध कान्त सहाय) :

(क) शिविरों में श्रीलंका के शरणार्थियों को निर्धारित मानदण्डों के अनुसार राहत सुविधाएं उपलब्ध कराई जा रही हैं। आशा की जाती है कि वहां सामान्य स्थिति के बहाल हो जाने पर वे अपने देश वापस चले जाएंगे। इसलिए उनको भारत में बसाने के उपाय करने की आवश्यकता नहीं है।

(ख) तमिलनाडु सरकार द्वारा भेजी गई...

(व्यवधान)

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN: Mr. Chairman, Sir, why does he not read the answer in English? We do not understand what he is saying. (*Interruptions*)

MR. CHAIRMAN: There is a provision for simultaneous translation you can put that earphone. (*Interruptions*) There is no question of Hindi or English in this. (*Interruptions*)